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Will voters accept two more years of the war?

Separate reports by the Central Intelligence Agency and the Defense Intelligence Agency concur on an estimate of the capability of North Vietnam to continue waging war in South Vietnam at the current level of intensity:

Both agencies estimate that the North Vietnamese can continue the war for two more years.

The American intelligence estimate of the number of North Vietnamese and Viet Cong dead in battle since the beginning of the North Vietnamese offensive late in March is 100,000. The number of South Vietnamese dead in that period is 25,000 to 30,000.

Extrapolating that 4½-month rate to a full year, one finds that North Vietnamese are dying in battle at the rate of 266,000 a year. Independent and presumably objective reports by the press, the diplomatic corps and occasional American visitors to Hanoi agree that the heavy American attacks have not weakened morale. The North Vietnamese have been willing — so far — to absorb their losses and continue the war.

AMERICANS are still dying in the war, too. The casualties are much lighter than when American ground troops were still in the fight, but planes are lost almost every day. Sometimes the pilots are recovered by American rescuers, sometimes the North Vietnamese announce their capture, and frequently they are reported only as "missing." At least some of the missing must be dead.

Even if only the Vietnamese casualty rates on both sides were considered, without reference to the American losses, can it be moral for the United States to maintain the war for two more years?

The United States is limited in its options of policy in its foreign relations as expressed in military operations in Vietnam.

Essentially, there are three:

- 1) Abandon the war.
- 2) Prosecute the war totally, using our most powerful weapons to achieve a quick military victory with as small a loss of American lives as possible.
- 3) Continue the war, but with more or less the same restraints on American power as at present — restraints imposed for diplomatic and political reasons.

THESE ARE the same options we have had for years, but the atmosphere in which the United States must choose among them has changed, despite the President's success in all but eliminating Americans in ground combat.

There are now few advocates of total war. Even the most militaristic mind appreciates that such a course would involve the United States in a useless and potentially suicidal war on the Asian mainland, and that we would have few if any allies.

Early and complete abandonment of the war has many more advocates today than a few years ago. There are many political considerations, of course, both foreign and domestic. But there is no longer much discernible enthusiasm for continuing the hemorrhagic drain of lives and materiel without hope of gain.

And the latter two—total peace or a continued half-war — are the only considerable alternatives.

Which shall we choose? How shall we register our choice? We shall, of course, be voting on this issue among others when we vote in the presidential election.